

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Eating Disorders

Task Force determines that more research is needed to recommend for or against screening in people without symptoms

WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 15, 2022 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today published a final recommendation statement on screening for eating disorders in adolescents and adults. The Task Force determined there is not enough research to make a recommendation for or against screening for eating disorders. **This is an I statement.** This I statement focuses on people who have no signs or symptoms of an eating disorder.

Grade in this recommendation:

I: The balance of benefits and harms cannot be determined.

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This is a new topic for the Task Force and one that is important to address because of the toll that eating disorders take on people and their families. Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions that change a person's eating behaviors and negatively affect their physical and social health. The most common eating disorders are anorexia, binge eating disorder, and bulimia.

"The Task Force looked at evidence on screening for eating disorders because of the serious harm these conditions can cause to mental and physical health, but unfortunately, we found very little research in people without signs or symptoms," says Task Force member Lori Pbert, Ph.D. "In the absence of this evidence, clinicians can help their patients by being aware of the signs and symptoms of eating disorders, listening to patient concerns, and connecting the people who need it to care."

Screening for eating disorders has the potential to decrease negative health outcomes and improve health if it leads to early detection and effective treatment. However, there is very limited evidence on the benefits of screening teens and adults without symptoms in primary care, so the Task Force is calling for more research. Signs and symptoms of an eating disorder include rapid weight loss or gain, slow heart rate, delayed puberty, or disruption of menstruation.

"There is not enough evidence about the potential benefits and harms of screening for eating disorders, particularly in the primary care setting with people who do not have signs, symptoms, or concerns," says Task Force vice chair Carol Mangione, M.D., M.S.P.H. "While evidence is limited in all people, certain groups need to be better represented in studies on eating disorders, including men, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community."

The Task Force's final recommendation statement and corresponding evidence summary have been published online in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, as well as on the Task Force website at: <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. A draft version of the recommendation statement and evidence review were available for public comment from October 19, 2021, to November 15, 2021.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of people nationwide by making evidence-based

recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Pbert is a professor in the Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences, associate chief of the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine, and founder and director of the Center for Tobacco Treatment Research & Training at the UMass Chan Medical School.

Dr. Mangione is the chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine and Health Services Research; holds the Barbara A. Levey, M.D., and Gerald S. Levey, M.D., endowed chair in medicine; and is a distinguished professor of medicine and public health at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the executive vice chair for Health Equity and Health Services Research in the UCLA Department of Medicine.

Contact: USPSTF Media Coordinator at Newsroom@USPSTF.net / (301) 951-9203